

Book Review

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Whittle Your Ears Poems, Songs, and Plays for Children BY BARBARA DAWSON BETTERIDGE REVIEWED BY RONALD E. KOETZSCH

Barbara Dawson Betteridge discovered Anthroposophy and Waldorf Education as a young woman living in southern California in the 1930s. Limited by health problems, Barbara could not become a Waldorf teacher, but in time she became a Waldorf parent and an avid supporter of Highland Hall, a Waldorf school in Los Angeles.

Barbara was gifted with a keen intellect, a rich and playful imagination, and a way with words. She used these capacities to write poems and songs for the children at Highland Hall. Also, at the behest of class teachers at the school, she wrote plays on particular themes for particular classes.

Barbara passed away in 2002 at the age of eighty-nine. *Whittle Your Ears* is a collection of Barbara's writing, meant to bring her gifts to the wider circle of Waldorf students. The book's title comes from a poem, "Promise."

Whittle your ears
if you would hear
whir of a beetle
whuff of a deer,
butterfly ripping
a spider's web
or bubble of crab
at tide's low ebb.

Whittle your ears
and sharpen your eyes
if you would find
where the falcon flies
where under the ocean
the limpet lies—
and you'll never grow old,
you will only grow wise.

The collection contains about fifty similarly charming poems for children, as well as about twenty songs, for some of which Barbara wrote the music as well as the words.

Barbara had a very deep interest in drama and the role it can serve in the wholesome education of children. She saw the class play as a tool to awaken the soul life of the children and to deepen their understanding and

experience of what they have studied in the classroom. Barbara observed that a well-written play develops good taste and a balance of soul and also helps the children develop clear speech and quickness of wit and body.

Whittle Your Ears also contains nine class plays written by Barbara. These include:

"Our Favorite Star," a third-grade play, whose cast consists of Three Big Angels and Many Little Angels;

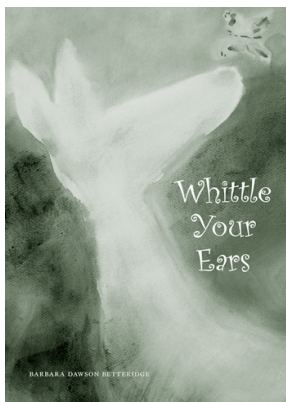
"Grammar's Garden," a fourth-grade play, in which a boy and girl meet and get to know the various parts of speech as real, living characters in the play;

"The Golden Fleece," a fifth-grade play, depicting a time in human development when human beings, though still aware of divine intervention, took an active role in forming their destinies; and

"The Castle of the Kingdom of the Stones," a sixth-grade play that combines fairy-tale imagery with the study of minerals.

Much of the dialogue in these plays is in rhymed verse and thus both challenges the children in a positive way and evokes very powerful dramatic effects.

Whittle Your Ears offers many literary treasures for the Waldorf class teacher and for Waldorf students as they move up through the grades.



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